

3. THE FERRY SYSTEM

The Washington State Ferry System has carried commuters and vacationers to islands and peninsulas throughout Puget Sound since 1951. Today, the system is the largest in the United States with 29 vessels serving eight counties and the Canadian Province of British Columbia. The Ferry System has not only defined itself as an integral component of the state's transportation network and an efficient means of mass transit, but also one of Washington's largest tourist attractions.

THE EARLY YEARS

Although ferry service has been provided on the Puget Sound since the late 1800's, the 1920's saw the greatest level of growth. Numerous ferryboat companies, mostly family owned, competed with each other for ridership. Fare wars and courtroom battles eventually resulted in most companies either being bought out or forced out of business. By 1929, only two companies, the Puget Sound Navigation Co. (PSNC) and the Kitsap County Transportation Company, survived. These operators were responsible for building many of the original terminals in locations currently in use today.

In 1935, labor disputes resulted in the closure of the Kitsap County Transportation Company, leaving only one operator - The Puget Sound Navigation Co. The company, more commonly known as the Black Ball Line, controlled all major routes on Puget Sound. Although the company was a private enterprise, its rates and routes were regulated by the state.

The Puget Sound Navigation Co. successfully provided transportation for cars and passengers. However, in the late 1940's, the PSNC found itself facing many new challenges. The ferry workers' labor unions were demanding higher wages and, to compensate for these higher costs, PSNC asked the state to approve a 30% fare increase. When denied, on March

1, 1948, the disgruntled company temporarily tied up its boats and ceased operations. This effectively put an end to most cross-sound ferry service.

Recognizing the need to reliably transport vehicles and passengers across Puget Sound, the State of Washington purchased the Puget Sound Navigation Co. including all terminals and ferries¹ in 1951. Ferry service became the responsibility of the Washington Toll Bridge Authority. The state originally intended to only provide ferry service temporarily until a network of bridges across the sound could be completed. However, in 1959, the legislature rejected the concept and ferry service was here to stay.

The Ferry System was jointly managed by the Washington Toll Bridge Authority (fare setting and financial control) and the State Highway Commission (operations). In 1977, the two agencies were combined, named the Washington State Ferries, and placed under the Washington State Department of Transportation.

The State's purchase of the Puget Sound Navigation Co. included an assortment of vessels, some in better condition than others. Most had been built in California including four still in service – the Illahee, Klickitat, Nisqually, and Quinault. Although most of the fleet was in good shape, they were quickly becoming overworked. The new Ferry System's first challenge was to add boats to relieve backups that were becoming routine. The first purchase was of two 70-car ferries from Maryland's Chesapeake Bay. The two were towed to Puget Sound, refitted, and renamed the Rhododendron and the Olympic.

1953 saw the next major change to the Ferry System. Increasing traffic on the Seattle-Bainbridge Island run required a larger vessel. The State approved a contract with Puget Sound Bridge and Dredge Company for a 100-car, 1,000 passenger ferry. A year later,

¹ With the exception of facilities and ferries on the Seattle – Victoria B.C. route.

the Evergreen State Ferry became the newest addition to the fleet. By the mid-1960s, the Evergreen State Class Ferries could not keep up with the growing volume of traffic. A "Super" Class of ferries was designed and in 1967, four boats were launched: the Hyak, the Kaleetan, the Yakima, and the Elwha, each with capacity for 160-cars and 2,500 passengers.

Although the "Super" Class of ferries helped relieve congestion, demand continued to increase. The next class up, the "Jumbo" Class ferry, was constructed to carry 206-cars and 2,000 passengers. The first one built, the Spokane, was launched in 1973, followed a few months later by the Walla Walla. Between 1979 and 1982, six 100-car Issaquah Class ferries were constructed and, most recently, three new "Jumbo" Class ferries – the Jumbo Mark II – have been introduced to the fleet. These ferries can carry 218 cars and 2,500 passengers.

Although the construction of new boats highlighted the growth of the ferry system, major refurbishment projects have been completed on other vessels to assure they are able to meet safety, comfort, and efficiency standards. In the late 1980's and early 1990's, 14 ferries were refurbished to improve operations and to upgrade each - some of which had been on the water since the days of the Puget Sound Navigation Company.

THE FERRY SYSTEM TODAY

In its first year of service, Washington State Ferries carried four million passengers. In 1999, over 26.8 million people rode the ferries. WSF is currently the second largest mass transit system in Washington and carries more people annually than Amtrak. The Ferry System is currently a major mode of transportation for workers and tourists alike.

Washington State Ferries' 1,800 employees assure that passengers are provided safe, timely, and reliable transportation. WSF currently defines its business operations as:

Business Definition:

Provide marine mass transportation linkages for people and goods throughout the greater Puget Sound Region and Vancouver Island.

Vision:

To be the most efficient, affordable, customer-focused ferry operator in the world.

Guiding Principles:

Safety, customer service, public trust, excellence, respect for others, and partnerships.

The Fleet

The Ferry System currently operates 29 vessels including 24 passenger/auto ferries and 5 passenger-only ferries.

<i>Class</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Year Built/Rebuilt</i>	<i>Age Built/Rebuilt</i>	<i>Autos</i>	<i>Passengers</i>
Jumbo	Tacoma	1997	3	218	2,500
Mark II	Wenatchee	1998	2	↓	↓
	Puyallup	1999	1	↓	↓
Jumbo	Spokane	1972	18	206	2,000
	Walla Walla	1972	18	↓	↓
Super	Hyak	1967	33	160	2,500
	Kaleetan	1967	33	↓	↓
	Yakima	1967	33	↓	↓
	Elwha	1967/1991	33/9	↓	↓
Issaquah	Chelan	1981	19	100	1,200
	Sealth	1982	18	↓	↓
Issaquah	Issaquah	1979/1989	21/11	130	1,200
130	Kitsap	1980/1992	20/8	↓	↓
	Kittitas	1980/1990	20/10	↓	↓
	Cathlamet	1981/1993	19/7	↓	↓
Evergreen	Evergreen State	1954/1988	46/12	100	1,000
State	Klahowa	1958/1995	42/5	↓	1,200
	Tillikum	1959/1994	41/6	↓	1,200
Steel	Quinault	1927/1985	73/15	75	616
Electric	Illahee	1927/1986	73/14	↓	↓
	Nisqually	1927/1987	73/13	↓	↓
	Klickitat	1927/1981	73/19	↓	↓
	Rhododendron	1947/1990	53/10	65	546
	Hiyu	1967	33	40	200
	Skagit	1989	11	POF	250
	Kalama	1989	11	↓	250
	Tyee	1985/1993	15/7	↓	317
	Chinook	1998	2	POF	350
	Snohomish	1999	1	↓	↓

Source: WSF

Illustration 1

Terminals

The WSF's twenty terminals serve ten routes. Fourteen of the terminals are owned by WSF while the remainder are leased. Maintenance and improvements on *all* terminals are provided by WSF.

Washington State Ferries Current Terminals

<i>Location</i>	<i>Real Estate Ownership</i>	<i>Trestle Built/Rebuilt</i>	<i>Toll Booths</i>	<i>Vehicle Holding Capacity</i>
Anacortes	Leased	1959/1971	4	500
Bainbridge Island	WSF	1966/1984	4	230
Bremerton	WSF	1990	2	100
Clinton	WSF	1951/1968	3	90
Edmonds	WSF	1952/1989/1995	3	175
Fauntleroy	WSF	1957/1984	1	100
Friday Harbor	WSF	1968/1992	1	255
Keystone	Leased	No Trestle	2	100
Kingston	Leased	1954/1986/1990	3	290
Lopez Island	WSF	1980	1	75
Mulilteo	Leased	1982	3	110
Orcas Island	WSF	1959	1	150
Point Defiance	Leased	1958/1994	1	50
Port Townsend	WSF	1982	2	110
Seattle	WSF	North: 1938/1964/1971/1987 South: 1991	4	650
Shaw Island	WSF	1974	1	15
Sidney, B.C.	Leased	N/A	1	240
Southworth	WSF	1957	2	150
Tahlequah	WSF	1958/1994	0	5
Vashon Island	WSF	1957/1974	0	100

Source: WSF

Illustration 2

In addition to its twenty terminals, WSF owns and operates the Eagle Harbor Maintenance Facility located on Bainbridge Island. This facility provides various repairs and maintenance for each vessel.

Routes

Washington State Ferries operates ten routes including international service to British Columbia. Service is primarily provided east-west. Although no competition from

private ferry systems exists on these routes, these operators do provide some north-south service including transportation to Vancouver Island and the San Juan Islands.

Washington State Ferries Current Routes



Source: WSF

Illustration 3